

Madam Speaker, I rise today to once again raise the issue of human rights. In January 2010, the Government of Vietnam sent police and government officials into a village to force parishioners and families to sign an agreement to sell their land. In April 2010, a 73-year-old parishioner named Le Van Sinh was hit with tear gas and fell unconscious. In May 2010, parishioner Mrs. Dang Thi Tan passed away and was met with extreme violence and 300 armed police officers and special anti-riot troops while her friends and family tried to bury her in the Con Dau cemetery. During the ceremony, the police attempted to seize the casket. The diocese of Da Nang also reported that Mr. Nam Nguyen, a parishioner of Con Dau was arrested, threatened and beaten to death.

Are these the actions of a country that respects human rights? The same country that committed these horrendous violations was taken off the Country of Particular Concern (CPC) list because the Department of State felt they had progressed in respecting religious freedom. The same country that detained these individuals for peacefully exercising their freedom of speech is a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

How can we identify Vietnam as an international partner when it is unable to respect and recognize the basic fundamental ideas of democracy and freedom? Vietnam must be put back on the CPC list and challenged by the U.S. government to improve and promote human rights in order to further United States-Vietnam relations.

I urge the Department of State to seriously address the human rights violations occurring in Con Dao. I also urge my colleagues to support the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Vietnam to investigate the ongoing human rights violations happening in Con Dau by becoming a cosponsor of House Resolution 1572.